

Cultural Studies Should Gamify

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This idea has already been broached at last night's plenary by Eileen Joy, with her idea of returning to serious play in discourse and practice, and also in today's member meeting, with expanding the scope of the conference.

That is why I've created GamifytheCSA.org, an experiment in gamifying the academic conference. Gamifying the CSA will enhance both of these impulses, with models in business and social networking with programs such as FourSquare, and extending to health and fitness, with programs such as Zombies, Run!, and the list goes on.

Jane McGonigal, in her book *Reality Is Broken*, identifies two key benefits to the gamification phenomenon: clarity of goals and immediacy of reward. She writes, "Compared with games, reality is pointless and unrewarding. Games help us feel more rewarded for making our best effort."

Academic conferences present similar problems to reality: the goals are at best abstract, and the rewards are at best deferred. Moreover, our exchanges seem to exist synchronically, only in the magical space-time of the conference, and then disappear, only to be all but reset the next year.

My goal with Gamify the CSA is to address these concerns: to understand and address the objectives of conference exchanges and to maintain the same level of consistent engagement that we bring to our classrooms or whittle away time with on Facebook and Twitter.

Even in its nascent stages, thanks to lots of feedback from fellow gamers, Gamify the CSA has already allowed participants to post and share their papers for those who, for one reason or another, cannot be present for their panels, to announce and promote events both professional and social, and to enable debates and discussions long after our time is up here in Chicago. It also provides positive reinforcement for making connections, engagement, and decorous, positive conference behavior with a forum I've labeled "Instant Karma!"

I hope the site will allow for continuity between CSA conferences, enable conversation and collaboration, and deepen our discourse.

So please, go to GamifytheCSA.org, register, and explore for five minutes, five months, or five years. Explore the site's capabilities, and you may just get rewarded for all your hard work here.

And I've come in under time here, for which I shall reward myself [play music].